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SOME PARALLELS TO SHAKESPEARE'S
“SEVEN AGES”

The division of human life into stages, from infancy to extreme old age, has occupied the minds of Heathens, Jews and Christians from the olden times down to Goethe; it has been discussed not only by poets but also by theologians, philosophers, politicians, and men of the medical profession. The division has however not always been into seven, but varied from two up to fourteen, and the variety of aim and purpose in dealing with the subject was just as great as that of the number of stages into which life has been divided. I will, however, limit my remarks mainly to utterances of the poets and legendists whose main object in dealing with the different stages of man's life was, like that of our own great poet, to illustrate the vanity of active life, and in this respect we shall have to deal with five different divisions, namely the division into *three, four, seven, ten, and twelve* stages.

The origin of the division of life into three stages may be found in the Bible. Thus in Deuter. xxxii. 25:

The sword without, and terror within, shall destroy both the *young man* and the *virgin*, the *suckling* with the *man of gray hair*.

A similar division is given by the Psalmist, cxlviii.12,13:

Both *young men*, and *maidens*; *old men*, and *children*: Let them praise the name of the Lord.

Besides the Hebrew literature, which has a prominent share in the division of stages, as will be seen anon, we must mention in connection with the three stages two Greek poets. Hesiod (8th century B.C.) speaks of the acts of the *young*, the advice of the *adults* and of the prayers of the *old*.¹

All these are merely crude allusions to the three main periods of man's life without establishing any comparison or pointing to any moral. It is not until about a thousand years later that we meet with a comparison of man's years to animals, a comparison which, as we shall show, was very popular at a later time. The Greek poet Babrius who put Aesop's Fables into

¹ Wackernagel, *Die Lebensalter*. Basel, 1862, p. 15.

verse wrote a poem (No. 74. *Furia* 278. *Coray* 194) the contents of which are as follows:—

Horse, bull, and dog appear freezing before the house of man. He opens the door, receives them kindly and offers them food; the horse gets barley, the bull legumens, and the dog food from the table. The animals filled with gratitude towards the man give up part of their years in return for his hospitality. First the horse repays with his years, that is why man is insolent in his *youth*; then the bull, therefore the *middle-aged* man has to work hard; last comes the dog with his years. The result is therefore that the *old* are always sulky, flattering only those who give them food, and disregard hospitality.

Thus we have here the three stages of man's life exactly as in the previous examples, only in addition to the mere divisions we are clearly given the motive of the animal in man.

Among the three Ages mentioned by the Rabbis² the following pronouncement is characteristic for its obvious intention to point to the vanity of human activity:—

When the man is *young* he sings songs;
when *grown up* he abounds in proverbs;
as *old man* he speaks empty words.³

The four stages are more popular and may be said to be of an international character. In their simplest form they figure in the Bible, where Jeremiah (LI. 22) says:—

With thee also will I break in pieces *man* and *woman*;
and with thee will I break in pieces *old* and *young*;
and with thee will I break in pieces the *young man*
and the *maid*.

A more poetical aspect is given to this division already in the sixth century B. C. when Pythagoras compares the four periods of man's life to the four seasons of the year (*Diog. Laërt.* vii. 10).

Thus far no age limit is mentioned in connection with any of these stages. An attempt at an exact division of the different stages is being made in the following old Rumanian story of man and his years:—⁴

When God created the world, he called all his creatures together to grant them their span of life, and to tell them how long they would live and what

² See Leopold Löw, *Die Lebensalter in der Jüdischen Literatur*. Szegedin. 1875, p. 21.

³ *Midrash Rabba* to the *Song of Solomon*, i, 1.

⁴ M. Gaster, *Chrestomatie Romana*, Bucharest. 1891, vol. ii, No. 113, and in *Rumanian Bird and Beast Stories*, 1915, p. 336 ff.

manner of life they would lead. The first to appear before God was man. And God said to him, "Thou, man, shalt be king of the world, walking erect upon thy feet and looking up to heaven. I give thee a noble countenance; the power of thought and judgment shall be thine, and the capacity of disclosing thy innermost thoughts by means of speech. All that lives and moves and goes about the earth shall be under thy rule, the winged birds and the creeping things shall obey thee, thine shall be all the fruits of the tree and land, and thy life shall be *thirty years*."

Then man turned away dissatisfied and grumbling. "What is the good of living in pleasure and in might, if all the years of my life are to be *thirty only*?" So did man speak and grumble, especially when he heard of the years granted to other animals, the ass, the dog, and the monkey who were allotted *fifty*, *forty*, and *sixty* respectively, and who were in their turn dissatisfied with their long periods of life accompanied with misery, worry and trouble. On their appeal for curtailment by twenty years of their span of life, the ass and dog are granted their request and so is also the monkey granted his request for the reduction of thirty years off his originally allotted sixty. Then man, greedy of life, steps forward and begs for himself the twenty years rejected by each, the ass and the dog, and the thirty years rejected by the monkey, so that he may live a hundred years altogether, and his request is also adhered to. Man lives, therefore, as a king and ruler over all creatures for the thirty years the Lord had given him, in joy and happiness, without care and without trouble. Then come the years from *thirty* to *forty*, which are the years of the ass; they are full of hard work, heavy burdens, and little food, for man is anxious to gather and to lay up something for the years to come. It could not be otherwise, for were not these the years which he had taken over from the ass? Then come the years from *forty* to *seventy*, when man sits at home and guards with great trembling and fear the little that he possesses, fearful of every shadow, eating little, always keeping others away lest they rob him of that which he has gathered, and barking at every one whom he suspects of wanting to take away what belongs to him. And no wonder that he behaves like that, for these are the dog's years, which man had asked for himself. And if a man lives *beyond seventy*, then his back gets bent, his face changes, his mind gets clouded, he becomes childish, a laughing-stock for children, an amusement for the fool, and these are the years which man had taken over from the monkey.

A very similar fable is told by a French poet. Delaunay relates in the first of his fifty fables⁵ entitled *Jupiter et les Animaux*, as follows:—

Lorsque le Maitre du tonnerre
Eut formé les Cieux et la Terre,
Créé l'Homme et les Animaux;
Il voulut à chacun assigner en partage
Une fonction, un usage,
Et fixer de leurs jours le terme et les travaux:
Toi, dit-il au Baudet, le destin de ton être

⁵In his *La vérité fabuliste*. Paris, 1732, p. 53 ff.

Est de preter le dos aux fardaux, que ton Maître
Desirera de t'imposer;
Et tu vivras autant d'années,
Que dans le cours d'un mois j'ai marqué de journées:
Trente ans! dit le Baudet; ah! daignez m'excuser,
Seigneur, c'est trop de jours, pour autant de souffrance:
Otez-en vingt au moins: passe; je le veux bien.
Alors le Dieu s'adresse au Chien;
Tu seras par ta vigilance,
Des Fermes, des Troupaux commis à ta défence,
Gratuitement gardien;
Car tu n'en auras pas pour cela plus de bien;
Mais dans ces fonctions illustres
Tu passeras plus de sept lustres.
Ah! Seigneur, moderez la Loi,
Sept lustres, dans un tel emploi!
De cinq hélas! faites-moi grace:
Volontiers, dit le Dieu. Le Singe ensuite passe:
Toi qui n'est bon à rien, lié, plein de besoins,
Tu seras le joueur des Enfants, des Esclaves,
Et tu vivras dans les entraves,
Six olympiades au moins.
Six! ah! d'un tiers, Seigneur, abregez, je vous prie,
Une si ridicule vie.
Soit: Puis il vint à l'Homme, et le Dieu des Humains,
Lui dit, chef-d'œuvre de mes mains,
L'Univers est ton apanage,
Tous les tresors sont ton partage,
Jouis-en bien, ils sont à toi;
Mais il faudra dans peu que tu les abandonnes;
Tu verras au plus trente Automnes:
O Ciel! vous me glacez d'effroi:
Est-il juste, grand Dieu, qu'un bien si désirable,
Qu'un bien, qui vient de vous, soit aussi peu durable?
Ah! du moins, qu'il me soit permis,
Puisqu'enfin il faut que je passe,
D'ajouter à mes jours, pour un plus long espace,
Ceux que l'Asne, le Chien, et le Singe ont remis.
Fort bien, dit Jupiter, oui, je t'en fais largesse;
Mais à condition que jusques à la mort,
Après trente ans faits, ton espace,
En jouissant des jours que chaque animal laisse,
Jouira d'un semblable sort.

Hélas! il est trop vrai; nous passons la jeunesse,
Et nous en profitons jusqu'à trente ans au plus;
Pendant ce tems, plaisirs, amour, et bonne chere,

Font nos amusemens et nos soins assidus;
 C'est l'état que d'abord Jupiter nous scut faire.
 Passé ce tems, grandeurs, soin de ménage, affaire,
 Viennent nous surcharger de leur énorme faix;
 Pour-lors, c'est l'état des Baudets.
 A cinquante ans et moins, nous sentons la misere
 Du Chien, gardien des troupeaux;
 Pour conserver les bien acquis par tant de maux,
 Nous nous privons du nécessaire,
 Nous immolons notre repos:
 Enfin, tels que le Singe arrêté par sa chaîne,
 Qui n'a ni paix, ni liberté,
 Nous sommes détenus par la caducité,
 Et souvent pour surcroit de peine,
 Nous sommes, comme lui, les malheureux jouets,
 Et des enfants, et des valets.

The similarity of the two fables, the Rumanian and French, is apparent, yet we cannot suggest any interdependance between them. There are two more versions of the story that deserve being mentioned here. The one is a German tale⁶ and relates how God, after the creation of the world, fixes the years of all creatures to be thirty. The animals dissatisfied with their long span of life appeal to God, and He alters His decision, reducing that of the ass by eighteen, of the dog by twelve, and of the monkey by ten years and adding these years to the originally promised thirty years of man. Thus man lives seventy years. When his own thirty years have elapsed, the eighteen of the ass follow. During these eighteen years man has to work hard and to carry heavy burdens. Then come the twelve years of the dog, when man lies in the corner, growls and has no teeth to bite with. His last years are those deducted from the monkey. During that last period of his life man is the laughing-stock for children.

The other version of the fable is represented in a Hebrew poem by Juda Löw Bensef (1764-1811)⁷ in which the tale is the same as in the preceding ones, the divergent points are that the ass is assigned thirty years which on his appeal are reduced to ten, similarly the dog and monkey have thirty-five and twenty years respectively reduced to ten, and the balance, *i.e.*, the

⁶ Grimm, *Haussmärchen*, no. 176.

⁷ Meassef, V (1788), pp. 388-391.

fifty-five years deducted from the animals' life, is added to the thirty years of man, who thus lives eighty-five years.

If we consider all the divergent and common features of the four mentioned versions of what seems to be the same beast fable we find that they all agree as to the original span of life allotted to man, namely thirty years, the kind of beasts that appeal for a shorter life appear in the same order in all the four versions, first the ass, then the dog and last the monkey; again all the versions in common point to the animal in man and to his greed for a longer life, which he ultimately succeeds in getting. Thus the main points are present in all the four stories. They only differ in minor facts. The number of years allotted originally as well as ultimately to the animals after the granted deduction and furthermore the final number of years man has to live after his thirty years are over differ in every version. This will be clear from the following table which shows the number of years originally granted to every creature, the years deducted, the net result after deduction, and finally the years of man after the years rejected by the animals have been allotted to him:—

	Rumanian	French	German	Hebrew
Ass—	50-20=30	30-20=10	30-18=12	30-20=10
Dog—	40-20=20	35-25=10	30-12=18	35-25=10
Monkey—	60-30=30	24- 8=16	30-10=20	20-10=10
Man—	30	30	30	30
Man—	100	83	70	85

Thus we see the difference in the number of years man has to live after all the additions are made. The two versions that differ least in this respect are the French and Hebrew, the French version giving him eighty-three while the Hebrew allots him eighty-five. They have still some other points of contact. In both versions the span of life allotted to the ass and dog as well as the years taken off therefrom are alike. I have put man at the end of the Table for convenience sake, although he appears in the Rumanian version first.

Though it may seem at the first glance that the Hebrew is dependent on the French, I would not suggest it. For the division of man's life into periods and its comparison to animals is so frequent in Hebrew literature, as we shall see further on,

that an imitation or adaptation from any other literature is very unlikely.

But before proceeding to show that, I will only refer to the Hungarian poet Karl Kisfaludy and to another French poet Edouard Pelouvier both of whom also wrote of the four ages.⁸ Finally, I mention Goethe, who has the following epigram:—

Als Knabe verschlossen und trutzig,
Als Jüngling anmasslich und stutzig,
Als Mann zu Taten willig,
Als Greis leichtsinnig und grillig!—
Auf deinem Grabstein wird man lesen:
Das ist fürwahr ein Mensch gewesen!⁹

The German poet brings us back with his divisions to the biblical four ages of childhood, boyhood, manhood, and old age, which have also been retained by those who prefer the division into heptads. For they only split childhood into three stages, reckon marriage as a separate stage, and thus obtain seven altogether.

The most interesting of these divisions which at the same time represent the fullest and most striking parallels to Shakespeare's "Seven Ages" are found on Hebrew soil, and emanate from the ninth century. They all have as their background, the same idea as our great poet, the vanity of human life. The first of these passages runs as follows:—

"The seven Vanities of which the Preacher (Eccl. i. 2) speaks¹⁰ correspond to the seven æons of man. At the age of a year he is like a king, put in a coach, embraced and kissed by all; at two or three he is like a pig dabbling in mud; at ten he bounds like a kid; at twenty he is like a horse neighing, beautifying himself, and looking out for a wife; when he has married he is like an ass; when children are born to him, he is as arrogant as a dog to get the means of sustenance; when he has grown old he is like a monkey, this only applies to an ignoramus, but to learned men applies the word of scripture, 'Now King David was old,' (i Kings, i.1), though he be old, yet he is like a king."

A more elaborate version exists in two different Hebrew sources which, apart from their variants in language and style, may be rendered thus:—

⁸ L. Löw, *l.c.*, p. 10.

⁹ Goethe's *Sämtliche Werke*, Stuttgart, 1885, i, p. 298.

¹⁰ The word 'vanity' occurs (Eccl. i, 2) twice in the plural, which the Rabbi considers as equivalent to four, and three times in the sing., making altogether seven.

"Seven worlds follow one another in rapid succession.¹¹ In the first, the child is like a king: for all greet it and long to catch a glimpse of it; they embrace and kiss it, it being but one year old. In the second stage, it may be compared to a pig, which wallows in the mud, this is when the child is two years old. In the third period, it resembles a kid, which capers hither and thither, making glad the hearts of all who look upon it. In the fourth stage, man may be likened to a spirited steed; for like the steed the boy of eighteen years runs about boasting of his youth. There comes the fifth stage, in which he becomes as the saddled ass, when (at the age of forty) he is bowed down by the burden of wife and children, having to travel backward and forward in order to bring home sustenance to the members of his household. In the sixth period of life he is like a dog, racing about in arrogance, shamelessly snatching from one in order to give to another. Lastly there comes the seventh stage of man's existence, when, like the monkey, his countenance is unlike that of any other creature, he asks like a child for everything, eating, drinking, and playing as a child; he returns to his youth only as far as his intelligence is concerned, but not in any other respect, so that even his own children and his household mock at him, disregarding and loathing him; and when he utters a word, people say of him, 'let him alone, for he is old and childish.' Thus he is like a monkey in all his actions and utterings."¹²

Here again, like in the four stages above, appear in all the three versions the ass, the dog and the monkey, in the same order as there and with the same motive, namely that in the last three stages of his life man leads the life of these animals. The septenary periods have hardly been derived from the speculations of Cabalistic philosophers upon the secret power of numbers and upon the climacterical year, they are more probably due to the influence of the Greeks or more especially the Athenians, whose social and political life suggests a division into seven ages of unequal duration.

The zoölogical metaphors must have been very popular. For we find them from now on represented everywhere in the comparison of man's life. The number as well as the kind of animals vary according to the requirement and taste of the respective authors. This is especially the case with the division into decimals, where each of the ten stages is compared to another animal, at ten to a kid, at twenty to a calf, at thirty to a bull, at forty to a lion, at fifty to a fox, at sixty to a wolf, at seventy to a cat, at eighty to a dog, at ninety to an ass, at a hundred to a goose.¹³

¹¹ *Ecclesiastes Rabba*, i, 2.

¹² *Midrash Tanhuma*, ed. Berlin, 1875, p. 264. Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, Leipzig. 1853, i, p. 154 seq.

¹³ Wackernagel, *l.c.*, p. 35.

That the division into ten periods must have been popular in Germany is proved by the fact that the subject has passed into a rhyming proverb, as follows:—

x	jor ein kint,
xx	jor ein jungling,
xxx	jor frisch man,
xL	jor wolgeton,
L	jor im abegan,
Lx	jor ein altman,
Lxx	jor schafs diner selen vor,
Lxxx	jor kinden tor,
xc	jor der welt ein spot,
c	Nun gnod sin got. ¹⁴

A far greater popularity has the subject enjoyed among the Jews. For the beautiful Hebrew poem by Abraham Ibn Ezra (middle of the 12th century) that describes the ten stages has even been incorporated in the liturgy not only of the Spanish and Portuguese but also in that of Polish and German Jews.¹⁵ A rendering into English may be of interest:

The son of earth should remember his origin, for one day to his mother he must return.

How cheerfully plays the child of five,
His way leads up a sunny day,
Now he lies quiet in his mother's lap,
Now he is riding on his father's neck.

Wherefore reprove ye the boy of ten?
He soon will grow, and wiser get;
As yet he listens to milder words
Of parents, friends, and play-fellows.

Oh that charming age of twenty,
A roe leaping over the mountains;
He shuns reproach, hears no advice,
And runs after the loving hind.

At thirty he belongs to his wife,
He looks about him, and lo! he is caught;
Beset by ever threatening darts,
The constant desires of wife and children.

¹⁴ G. Binz, *Die deutschen Hss. der Oeffentlichen Bibliothek der Universität Basel*. Basel, 1907, part i, p. 250. Cf. Wackernagel, *l.c.*, p. 30 seq.

¹⁵ Cf., for instance, the Prayer Book ed. Vilna (Rosenkranz & Schrift-setzer), 1874, p. 1.

And restless now he reaches forty,
Content whatever be his lot;
He moves on, forsakes his friends,
Labors and watches without leisure.

At fifty he remembers the vanity of life,
Sadly looks forward to evil days,
Despises all worldly splendor,
And fears his time will soon be over.

What has become of him at sixty?
There is neither twig nor root;
The rest is weakness and frailty,
Of no avail in the battle of life.

And do his years come to seventy,
He is not looked at nor listened to;
Has become a burden to his friends,
Nay even to himself and his wife.

And with eighty a burden to his children,
A derision to all his neighbours;
He has neither eyes nor heart,
His cup is gall, wormwood his bread.

Beyond that age he is looked upon as dead:
Blessed, if considered a pilgrim;
There are no other thoughts in him
But for future life and reward.¹⁶

This division is quite different from all the others. The psychological point, the animal in man, is entirely absent. Even the divisions themselves are unlike the others. For though they contain ten stages, they are not all of equal duration nor do they extend to a hundred years. The only features common to the preceding versions are the idea of the vanity of life, which is so markedly emphasized in the poem, and to which it probably owes its place in the liturgy, and the duration of man's life which is given in the poem at beyond eighty years. In this respect it resembles the French and Hebrew versions of the four ages. It also reminds us of Plato's division into nine stages of nine years each, where the normal age is eighty-one years, and of the division into twelve periods of seven years each by the Peripatetic Staseas, with the normal age of eighty-four years.

¹⁶ *The Poems of Abraham Ibn Ezra* (in Hebrew) ed. Warsaw, 1894. i, p. 171 seq. Cf. also J. W. Jones, *Observations on the Division of man's life into stages prior to the "Seven Ages" of Shakspere*. London, 1853, p. 7.

Staseas was the first to attempt the division of man's life into twelve stages. Later on we find in a Hebrew source human life compared to the twelve signs of the zodiac.¹⁷ But of greater interest for our purpose is a division into twelve coming from Italy through Jewish intermediation. The division is contained in a Bodleian manuscript (Can. Or., No. 1217, fol. 211b-213a), written in Venice and dated January, 1554. It is composed in German and Italian rhyming prose written in Hebrew characters. Human life is there compared at one year to a king, at three to a pig, at seven to a kid of goats, at eighteen to a horse, at thirty to a fox, at forty to a lion, at fifty to a cock, at sixty to a dog, at seventy to a monkey, at eighty to a serpent, at ninety to an ox, at a hundred to a house in ruins.

The text may follow here with the amendations necessary for the understanding of its contents. For the by no means easy task of restoring and amending the exceedingly corrupt Italian version I have to thank the admirable skill and untiring zeal of Mr. Cesare Foligno, M.A., Taylorian Lecturer in Italian at Oxford.

Das mensch gegelichen . . . zu einem tor, zu ein schwein, zu ein zicklin,
zu ein fuchs, zu ein lew, zu ein han, zu ein hunt, zu ein af, zu ein hüs, zu ein slang'
zu ein ochs.

Ein kind vun einem jar
glich as ein nar, ein tor (Ms. torer);
doch tuot man im sin beger,
glich as es ein kunig wer.

Un' put di teta
uribel (Ms. uri bel uri) malneta
. . . port' (Ms. unge umport) grando amor
com' a un' re e grando sinior.

Wen es is drter jar eilt(!),
es hand un' fuos hat zu gewalt;
es nit wil (!) sin un' witz hat,
es walt as ein schwein im kot.

Cum el à ani tre
son vestiment gimtre(?)
el n'a guardo 'sun (Ms. soum) al bel
el si volta entr' al fanga come un purcel.

¹⁷ *Midrash Tanhuma*, towards the end of Deut.; English translation in *Jewish Chronicle*, Nov. 23, 1894, p. 11.

Ein zicklin. Wen es kumt zu siben jaren,
 es macht sich hervoren;
 es hat nit vil sin un' witz,
 es springt glich as ein kitz.

Cuma el a die ani set
 quest vera diceret
 el no va ai (Ms. nova aj) dret
 el salta coma un' cabret (Ms. cbaret).

Ein pherd. Wen es kumt zu jaren achtzehn,
 es beginnt sich um zu sehen;
 es suucht sich guot in den(!) welt,
 as ein pferd, das do get zelt.

Coma el à di ani dizot (Ms. diz ot)
 urmai è'l cresciut di bot
 el st' in guart de tanto (Ms. el stin guart e dtanto)
 el va cumu un' caval dipurtanto.¹⁸

Ein fuchs. Wen es kumt zu jaren drîsik,
 es is zu allem flîsic (Ms. es sich zu a. flist);
 es verliert sich in allen nist,
 as ein fuchs mit aller list.

Cumo el à di ane trenta
 del ben e mal el senta
 el va atinder el so fat
 cumo un' volpo quant . . . ¹⁹

Wen er in die vierzig jar ist getreten,
 so is er ein man besteten;
 oder man furcht vor im hat,
 as sluog in ein lew mit siner phot.

Cuma el à di ane queranta
 è el (Ms. el) un' um cum toto pusanta
 lo sofizent è scort
 cumo un gerd dear port(?).

Ein han. Wen er zu den funfzik jaren hat,
 mit sinen kindern er sich berat;
 er nigs(!) one stn kinder tuot,
 as ein gluck, die ir huner hat us gebrerot.

¹⁸ *dipurtanto* may be a gerund, with a *t* for the rhyme, or a pres. part. with an *o*-ending for the same reason.

¹⁹ Ms. el liglis kat (sic).

Cumo el à di ane zinquaanta
di lo sui fiuli si mentata
el fa qual chi lor vol
come un' kiuki²⁰ di²¹ so fiol(!).

Ein hunt.

Wen er kumt in die sechzik jar,
sin kraft er mér wen halb verlor;
er is guot in hús zu aller stund,
das er zu dem hús sicht as ein alter hunt.

Cuma el à li sesanta ane intrad
el so cun timp'à (Ms. kuntimpa) mancad
sempar in pensir e grando pan
è'l si bon in casa pi²² guardian, cuma un can.

Ein af.

Wen er kumt in die sibzik jar,
halber(!) er verlor;
slafen un' essen un' triken is im guot,
er sitzt, stet in den stul, as ein af tuot.

Cum el li setanta ana intrad nun è'l piu ancuntar
le mitar²³ di manzar e bebar
nun val asar prigá
simpr (Ms. stimpr) seder cum' un' simia (sic) escadriga.

Ein slang.

Wen er achzig jar eilt (!) wert,
er get gebukt wiſ ūf die erd;
im is die zit un' och die wiſ lang,
er kricht ūf der erd as ein slang.

Cuma el à ane otanta soi renta
non à'l puei pusanta
el non ben puei far guera (Ms. par guer')
el va com' un' vis²⁴ par tera.

Ein ochs.

Wen er kumt zu niuzig (!) jaren,
do hat er al sin hushim²⁵ ver loren;
er kan sich nit mér der nern,
as ein alter ochs, der sich der vliegen nit kan der weren.

Cum' el à onanta ani el cuminzá
aver malania el non sa
far nison (Ms. par ni son) ven²⁶
cum' el bo magir le musche . . . ²⁷

²⁰ *kiuki* is probably onomatopeic for 'hen.'

²¹ *di* distinctly so, it ought to be *chi* or rather *che*.

²² *pi* probably stands for per, pe.

²³ The *r* in *mitar* should probably be omitted.

²⁴ We clearly have here change of *b* to *v*, for *bisc*, *biscia*.

²⁵ Hebrew for "senses."

²⁶ On *ven* see the last but one note.

²⁷ Ms. has here *voltir ven*.

Wen er is nun hundert jar alt,
 er nit hat zu gewalt;
 er wert kal un' glat as ein mûs,
 er falt nieder as ein gebrochen hûs.

Cum' el li ani zenti a (Ms. ani) cumpii mid²⁸
 toti le so cose va (Ms. vagi pisid?)
 anchn vich cum' un' soris brobad (sic)
 cum' un' cazi rota nun abitad.

It is obvious that the division given in this poem is based on the midrashic metaphor. For, apart from the first three stages where they correspond almost literally, the fourth one is no less striking by similarity, and the eighth and ninth stages, too, find their analogues in the last two stages of Midrash, where the man is compared to the hound and ape, and here again the last one is almost a translation from the Hebrew source. The third and fourth periods merit a few remarks. The third one which is not given any fixed age in the midrashic paraphrase is in the Germano-Italian version limited to seven years, and in both versions this period extends to the eighteenth year, the year of maturity or ephebe. Both these age limits, seven and eighteen, may be due to the Athenian division of the different ages.²⁹ That the puberty of man is reached with his eighteenth year is also expressed in another quite interesting Jewish division of the ages of man. It is found in the twenty-fourth paragraph of the last chapter of the *Sayings of the Fathers*,³⁰ which has become very popular owing to the insertion of these chapters into the Jewish Prayer Books. The passage in question runs as follows:—

"At five years the age is reached for the study of Scriptures, at ten for the study of Mishna, at thirteen for the fulfilment of the commandments, at fifteen for the study of the Talmud, at *eighteen* for marriage, at twenty for seeking a livelihood, at thirty for strength, at forty for understanding, at fifty for counsel, at sixty for old age, at seventy for the hoary head, at eighty for special strength (Psalm xc. 10), at ninety he bends beneath the weight of years, at a hundred he is as if he were already dead and had passed away and withdrawn from the world."

²⁸ Probably 'cupid' (?).

²⁹ Löw, *l.c.*, p. 4.

³⁰ Ch. Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, 1897, p. 96.

Thus we see here quite clearly that the year eighteen is the age of full development. We should, of course, look in vain for a close relationship between the latter passage and the Germano-Italian version of the ages, seeing that the one has been composed in a different mood, and with an object different from that of the other; the former being of a pedagogical nature, while the latter is purely satirical. Yet we cannot help noticing some features common to both, beside the one already mentioned. The points of contact are obvious at the age of fifty, when man is declared to be able to advise others or is said to like to take advice; the man of eighty is characterized in the satire as being bent, and so he is in the other version at ninety, while at a hundred he is described in both versions as a worthless being. Though these points of contact can hardly be accidental, I do not see any direct interdependence between the two versions, but I think there is not a shadow of doubt that the Germano-Italian satire has largely drawn on the Midrash Tanhumah.

Taking all these versions of the stages of life together they show once more the striking example how the same motive can be preserved through many centuries and with numerous nations. In the present case the motive which influenced all these compositions is so much the same that it can hardly be accidental, yet a direct adaptation cannot be proved, though an indirect influence is beyond doubt. They show, furthermore, how immeasurably they all, with the exception of Ibn Ezra's poem, fall short of the poetic conception of our own great poet, the author of 'As You Like It.'

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